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By Ulrich Bonnell Phillips.





Class F294

Book M2P5

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BY

ULRICH BONNELL PHILLIPS, Ph. D.

Instructor in History in the University of Wisconsin



PUBLISHED IN

The Gulf States Historical Magazine

November, 1903

F294
M6P6

HISTORICAL NOTES OF MILLEDGEVILLE, GA.

BY ULRICH BONNELL PHILLIPS, PH. D., Instructor in History in the University of Wisconsin.

Milledgeville was a fairly typical unprogressive village in Middle Georgia; a town in the midst of a region where town life was overshadowed by the prominence of the plantation system. The merchants and the innkeepers and perchance the lawyers, twirled their thumbs or whittled soft pine throughout the spring and summer, until with the arrival of autumn the neighboring planters began to drop in and market their cotton, and the politicians began to arrive from all directions to spend a month or two and make the laws of the land.

Milledgeville owed its existence to a State enactment of 1803, which ordered its survey as a town and gave it its cumbersome name, when its site was still a wilderness but recently surrendered by the Indians. It owed such commercial importance as it came to have to its location at the head of navigation upon the Oconee river. It was a collecting point for cotton bound for the sea, and a distributing point for manufactures from Europe and the North. But the Savannah and the Ocmulgee were greater streams, with better navigation, and the merchants of Augusta and later of Macon* were more enterprising. The commerce of Milledgeville, when once developed, remained purely local and almost stationary.

The town owed its political importance to an act of the Legislature in 1804, which selected it as the seat of the State government before a dozen cabins had been built within its limits. But in 1868 the capital was removed to Atlanta, and Milledgeville lost its political prop. The building of railroads, which put an end to the river traffic, had already destroyed the commercial advantage which its location on the river bank had secured in the early period. The town accordingly stagnated through Reconstruction and the following decades. Within very recent years Milledgeville has unexpectedly

* Macon was founded in 1822, forty miles west of Milledgeville, and quickly asserted a successful claim to a share of the commerce of the intervening territory.

taken a firm hold upon itself and has done surprising things—surprising, at least, for Milledgeville.

Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin, in 1793, moulded the subsequent history of Middle Georgia. The early settlers had lived as small farmers, raising corn and wheat and a little tobacco. But from 1800 the production of cotton grew so rapidly in importance that within a decade it overshadowed all other forms of industry. The tide of immigration was changed in character. Virginia and North Carolina planters left their tobacco lands for the more inviting cotton belt. They brought their slaves with them, and slave traders brought still others from the older States and the sea coast and sold them in the cotton region. By 1810 the number of blacks in the vicinity of Milledgeville was about equal to that of the whites. As late as 1821 the Indian country was only a day's march to the west. Society in this region near the frontier was in the main primitive and rough; but a sprinkling of great planters gave here and there some atmosphere of distinction and culture.

Except for the great export staple there would have been little use for merchants or towns. But cotton had to be marketed, and Milledgeville was one of the centers. From the treaty of peace with England in 1815 to the great panic of 1837 there were flush times in the cotton belt. Planters and farmers and slaves fared well, and commercial towns grew with some rapidity; but the plantation advantages attracted the chief attention. Merchants and lawyers were fond of investing their earnings in lands and slaves; for the profits in cotton were heavy, and, moreover, it was deemed more honorable to be a planter than to follow any other calling. The towns could barely hold their own against the attractions of the country. Some of the townsmen who turned planters continued to live in town; but the ideal site for a home was thought to be in the midst of a grove upon the crest of a hill an hour or two's drive outside the town.

The town, however, was on Saturdays and court days and throughout the autumn the scene of much activity. Its streets and shops and court house were places for the dissemination of news and the forming of public opinion. The interaction between town and country sentiment and institutions

was very close. And any insight into town conditions is to be valued as giving a glimpse of the life of the old South, now so difficult for the student to reconstruct with faithfulness.

Milledgeville was incorporated by a legislative act of 1810. The town records, to be found in the town clerk's office in a state of neglect, extend from 1816, with a few breaks, to the present. They afford an excellent view of the range of the official action of the town authorities, and here and there they throw unexpected light upon the customs and circumstances of the people. Among these records the town census of 1828 is a treasure, for it not only gives the number of inhabitants but also indicates the occupations of the people, and shows the number of slaves held by each family.

The total population in 1828 is given at 1,599. Total whites, 831, of which 197 were males below 18 years of age; 288 were males above 18 years, and 346 were females. Of male slaves under 18 years old there were 176; above 18 years, 159; total male slaves, 335; female slaves, 413; total slaves, 748; free persons of color, 20; of which 8 were males and 12 females.

Of 167 white families, 41 had no slaves; 12 had 1 each, 17 had 2 each, 25 had 3 each, 9 had 4 each, 13 had 5 each, 10 had 6 each, 11 had 7 each, 6 had 8 each, 5 had 9 each, 6 had 10 each, 3 had 11 each, 2 had 12 each, 2 had 13 each, 1 had 14, 1 had 15, 1 had 17, 1 had 18, 1 had 19, 1 had 21.

Among the whites, 12 were attorneys, 6 physicians, 21 merchants, 16 shopkeepers, 9 innkeepers, 21 printers, 26 house carpenters, 2 joiners, 5 blacksmiths, 6 boot and shoe makers, 4 silversmiths and 8 tailors.

The fact that the town was the State capital accounts for the large number of innkeepers and printers. The white households of the innkeepers were large, and they were, as a class, the largest slaveholders in the town. They had slaveholdings of 5, 5, 6, 12, 12, 14, 17, 19 and 21, respectively. The printers, a few merchants and several attorneys also had relatively large numbers of slaves. But, of course, the great mass of the slaves was upon the plantations and beyond the reach of this census taker's inquiries. Eighty per cent. of the white families in the town had slaves for domestic service. John Marlow is listed with 3 white men and 7 slaves, all of

whom were carpenters. James Camak had 6 slaves, among whom one or two are apparently listed as printers. William Y. Hansell had 10 slaves, among whom one was a carpenter, one a blacksmith and one a cobbler. All free negroes are listed under the names of their white guardians. Their occupations are not stated.

The census taker, who was also the town marshal, possessed an inquisitive turn of mind. Though it was not set down in his instructions, he made jottings of fifteen prostitutes, all of whom appear to have been white women. Of course there was, in addition, a considerable number of occasional prostitutes among the negroes and mulattoes; but the police regulations over the slaves were too strict to permit any of them to be openly professionals. The large number of the women of the town was due to the residence of the host of legislators and other politicians in the town during the annual sessions of the General Assembly.

The minutes of the corporation of Milledgeville extend through nearly the whole lifetime of the town. They contain a record of the enactment and the enforcement of town ordinances, and the conduct of the town's finances and general administration. Here and there they give glimpses of the course of public opinion. The following notes are illustrative:

Item, July 30, 1822. An ordinance. (1.) No slave may live off the lot inhabited by his owner or employer. (2.) No slave may hire his own time from his master or contract to labor for any other person. (3.) No person of color may keep spirituous liquors for sale, and none may keep any horse, cow or hog for his own use. (4.) No free person of color may live in Milledgeville except with a guardian living in the town and a certificate of character and a bond for good behavior. Not exceeding four washerwomen at one time shall be exempt from the provisions of this ordinance, and they only when specially licensed.

Item, August 22, 1822. An ordinance. Articles (1) and (2) of the above ordinance of July 30 are suspended until December 15 in the case of slaves provided with certificates of character and covered by bonds for good behavior.

Item, February 1, 1823. An ordinance for a patrol. Ordered that the marshal divide the whole list of citizens subject to patrol duty into thirty squads, and that each squad do patrol duty for one night in each month. Exemption from patrol duty may be purchased at \$6 per year.

Item, March 22, 1823. Fines of \$1 each are imposed upon fifteen citizens for failure to perform patrol duty.

Item, January 7, 1824. 'Treasurer's report. Amount received in 1823 in fines for failure to do patrol duty, \$40.50.

Item, January 12, 1824. An ordinance repealing the above ordinance of February 1, 1823.

Item, January 31, 1831. An ordinance providing a new system of patrol. Ordered that the marshal and three sergeants with salaries of \$100 a year shall command the patrol in succession. Five citizens are to serve each night. The patrol is to continue from 9 p. m. to 3 a. m. Persons failing to patrol or furnish substitutes are subject to fine from \$1 to \$5.

Item, February 2, 1825. An ordinance for organizing a town guard to replace the former patrol system. Citizens are permitted to volunteer and receive payment for services. The duty of the guard is to apprehend every slave between ten and sixty years of age found off his master's premises without a pass after the ringing of the market bell at night. Slaves apprehended are to be kept in the guard house till morning, and their owners notified. Each slave is to be released after twenty-five lashes on the bare back and the payment of \$1 by the owner.

Item, June 14, 1825. An ordinance amending the above ordinance by exempting slaves from whipping for the first offense.

Item, April 22, 1831. Ordered that the Secretary serve a citation on Edward Cary and that the Marshal be directed to bring before this board a negro slave named Nathan belonging to the said Cary, on Monday next, to answer the charge of assault and battery, on one of the patrol of the town and show cause why punishment should not be inflicted.

Item, April 24, 1831. In response to the above citation, Edward Cary appeared without the negro. He alleged that Richard Mayhorn had violated the ordinance of the town by

transcending his authority as a Patrol. The evidence of witnesses was introduced to substantiate Cary's statement. The Board ordered that Richard Mayhorn be discharged from the service of the corporation.

Item, July 13, 1831. A patrol reported riotous conduct on the part of a negro named Hubbard, and charged Hubbard with cursing, assaulting and bruising Billy Woodliff, (a slave of Seaborn Jones ?) at the door of Billy's shop. Billy Woodliff, being sworn, related how Hubbard abused and bruised him with a rock. Robert Mercer and Mr. Winter also testified. The fact was brought to light that Hubbard's attack upon Billy had been brought about by Billy having taken Hubbard's wife away from him. "The testimony being concluded, Mr. Wiggins addressed the Board in a speech containing some *lengthy*, *strengthly* and *depthy* argument. Whereupon the Board *Ordered* that the negro man Hubbard receive from the Marshal *Ten* lashes moderately laid on, and be discharged."

Item, February 12, 1830. Whereas, the Board has received information that Elijah H. Burritt has violated the statute of the last Georgia legislature by the introduction of certain insurrectionary pamphlets, resolved that the town marshall be directed to enter his name as prosecutor in the case, and that this Board will pay all expenses necessary to bring the offender to punishment.

Item, September 13, 1831. Ordered that the marshall and deputies use increased vigilance with regard to our black population, and particularly that they do not fail to visit every place at which there is an assembly of negroes, and in the event of religious meetings to treat them as the law directs for unlawful meetings, unless there is present at least one white person accepted by the church to which the society belongs.

The rise of the abolition agitation in the North in 1829 and 1831, and the Nat Turner insurrection in Virginia, account, of course, for the policy of the Board as indicated in the two items last noted above.

Item, October 5, 1831. The negro man Nathan belonging to W. B. Hepburn, was brought before the board and examined relative to a suspected insurrection among the blacks.

Whereupon, after due consideration of all the circumstances, it was ordered that, as nothing criminal has been proved against him, he be immediately discharged. The yellow man Richard Rogers, a Preacher, was examined and likewise discharged. So also Aleck Reynolds, the Blacksmith, and Casewell, a blacksmith belonging to Peyton Pitts. The Board ordered that, whereas, there has been considerable danger in the late excitement and alarm of an intention at insurrection, by firing guns "by persons carrying arms that were intoxicated," and by boys unable to bear arms, it be ordained that the marshall and patrols take away arms from intoxicated persons and boys and enforce the ordinance against firing arms in the streets.

The examination of these negroes suspected of conspiracy in 1831 and the trials of Nathan and Hubbard, noted above under dates of April 22 and 24 and July 13, 1831, appear to be the only instances recorded of negroes having been tried by the Milledgeville authorities for crimes or misdemeanors prior to the outbreak of the Civil War.

Item, January 5, 1839. "On motion of Alderman Cook, Resolved, That the Marshal be and he is hereby required to pay over to the Council immediately after the passage of this Resolution, all monies received by him for superintending the Balls given by the colored people during the Christmas holidays, and that he be instructed not to receive in future any compensation for such services."

Item, December 19, 1839. Resolved, That the Board deem it improper to grant negroes the privilege of having balls at any other time than during the Christmas holidays, and then in the day time, and that no consent shall be granted except upon the application of the owners or guardians of the negroes.

Item, January 21, 1841. Resolved, Upon petition, that the band of musicians composed of colored persons be allowed to practise in the old theatre not later than 10 o'clock, until further ordered by the board, provided they obtain the services of some suitable white person to accompany them.

Item, July 15, 1841. An ordinance. It shall be the duty of the marshal and deputy to report any white person disturbing the peace. (Elsewhere the marshal and deputy are directed

to patrol and prevent negro disturbances and to report and bring to trial all white persons breaking the peace. The repetition of this ordinance in July 1841 indicates that an element among the whites had become especially troublesome about that time.)

Item, September 18, 1854. The Board resolves that the petition before them asking the privilege for the negroes of the city of erecting a church for their separate use upon the lands of the city, cannot be entertained unless it be signed by a majority of the citizens of Milledgeville.

Item, January 10, 1840. The Board resolves to order the engraving of bills of the denominations of \$3, \$2, \$1, \$.50 and \$.25 to the total amount of \$14,440.

Item, April 2, 1840. The Change Bills have arrived from Washington to the amount of \$7,357.50. The cost of engraving is \$200.

Item, April 4, 1840. The Board resolves that these change bills be signed up and put into circulation as rapidly as possible, in exchange for bank notes. Ordered that no notes shall be issued unless a fund for their redemption is on hand equal to at least one-third of the amount proposed to be issued.

In this period of financial depression in the cotton belt, bills of credit were issued by numerous town corporations. In the *Southern Recorder*, January 16, 1842 (a newspaper printed at Milledgeville), a table of the rate of exchange is given. The notes of the Augusta City Council are quoted at par, while those of Columbus, Macon and Milledgeville are quoted at 15 per cent. discount. For Savannah scrip, 1840, see Thomas Gamble, Jr., *History of the City Government of Savannah, Ga., from 1790 to 1901*, pages 173-4.

Item, February 23, 1841. "The Street Committee reported that they had hired for the present year the following named hands, from the persons whose names are thereunto annexed, viz.:

Antoinette, of T. F. Greene, trustee.....	\$ 100 00
Isaac, of C. J. McDonald.....	150 00
Monday & Sam, of M. J. Kenan	250 00
Prince, Andrew & Prince, of Sarah Davis	375 00
Henry & Bill, of Emmon Bails	120 00
Andrew, of I. S. Wright.....	120 00
Joe, of James Smith.....	120 00
	<hr/> \$1,355 00

"Ordered that notes be executed by the Mayor to the owners of said hands for the several amounts above stated."

Item, January 2, 1840. Rations of negroes hired by the town of Milledgeville: Each week, one peck of meal, six pounds of bacon and one pint of molasses, in season.

Mention is made here and there, also, of potatoes, rice and beef, seemingly for the negro hands. Corn was worth about 50 cents per bushel, bacon 13 cents per pound. The town fed, clothed and sheltered the negroes it hired. One pair pantaloons cost \$3.00, one round jacket, \$3.00; one shirt, \$1.00; one pair shoes, \$1.25 to \$1.50. The support of the hands and four mules in 1840 cost \$897.98. [*Minutes, December 3, 1840.*]

The digest of taxes for 1859 gives a total of 335 taxpayers, of which eight were free negroes. One of these had property assessed at \$440, and two others at \$75 each. The remainder paid poll tax alone. The real estate was valued at \$317,000 and the slaves at \$318,600. Taxes were levied as follows: On white males between 18 and 45 years of age, a poll tax of \$2.00; on white males between 16 and 18 and between 45 and 60, a poll tax of \$1.00; on free male persons of color, between 16 and 60, a poll tax of \$10; on free female persons of color between 15 and 50, a poll tax of \$5.00; on slaves between 10 and 60 years of age, 40 cents for every \$100 of the returned valuation; on real estate and personal property, 40 cents on \$100; on merchandise, 50 cents on \$100; on money at interest, 30 cents on \$100; on peddlers, 10 per cent. of their sales; on liquor shops, \$50 each; on billiard tables, \$25 each; on bagatelle tables, \$20 each; on ten-pin alleys, \$25 each; on bakers, \$10 each; on forges, \$10 each; on printing offices, \$40 each; on bank agencies, \$100 each.

The cash book of the Town Treasurer has an entry under date of November 26, 1864:

"By amount on hand, captured by the Yankees, \$1,-032.30.

Numerous entries show the depreciation of Confederate money; for instance, under date of March 3, 1863:

"By amount paid for 8 candles, \$8.00. By amount paid for pair of shoes, \$35.00."

The Record of the Police Court of Milledgeville, 1854 to 1870, contains the records of some 480 misdemeanor cases

tried in the mayor's court. Of these none appear to have been against slaves or free persons of color before 1862.

Item, February 15, 1862. "The State vs. Wm., a slave of Doct. G. D. Case. Disorderly & Disobedient Conduct. After hearing the testimony in the above case [it] is ordered and adjudged that Doct. G. D. Case pay the cost and that the boy William receive Ten Lashes by the hand of the Marshal, and then be discharged."

Item, December 8, 1862. The State vs. Hamilton, a slave. Retailing spirituous liquors. Pleaded guilty. Sentenced to thirty-nine lashes.

Item, May 14, 1864. The State vs. Viney, a slave. Using opprobrious and impudent language to a white person. Sentenced to thirty-nine lashes.

Item, July 26, 1865. "The State vs. Jarratt (Freedman)." Petit larceny. Sentenced to ten days' imprisonment in the guard house, to be fed on bread and water.

Item, August 17, 1865. "The State vs. Charles Harris (Freedman)." Malicious mischief. Sentenced to a fine of \$25 or in default to be kept in jail until the meeting of the superior court. The sentence was committed to the wearing of ball and chain and working on the streets for fifteen days.

Item, August 28, 1865. The State vs. Anderson McComb, a freedman. Fighting. Sentenced to fine of \$5 or five days work on streets.

Item, August 28, 1865. Three cases of vagrancy against freedmen. Sentenced each to five days work on the streets.

Item, September 15, 1869. The State vs. Joseph Young, colored. Drunkenness. Sentenced to \$5 fine or six days in jail.

From 1865 the 1869 the court followed the custom of sentencing white persons to fine or imprisonment in jail, while it sentenced negroes to fine or labor in the chain gang on the streets. After 1869 that distinction apparently ceased to be made.

For a complete view of the life of the community, the town records must be supplemented with the county archives, the state documents, the newspaper files, travelers' accounts, and private correspondence.

The Ordinary's office in the court house at Milledgeville contains a valuable record on wills, inventories, appraisals

and sales of estates. From these we may gather that Jesse Sanford at his death in 1827 possessed 25 domestic servants besides 228 field hands distributed upon his six plantations, and that his personal property embraced mahogany furniture, silver plate and cut glass decanters. But we may learn on the other hand, that in dozens of cases a featherbed or two was inventoried as the most valuable item in the estate, aside from the lands, houses and slaves. For one great nabob there were scores or even hundreds of very plain farmers, shopkeepers and the like.

The state archives contain a record of the routine affairs which were attended to in the capitol and the executive mansion. The newspaper files, of which there are unusually good sets in Milledgeville, tell of the course of party politics, of the great speeches, the price of cotton, and the state of the crops. Their editorials and news items are supplemented by a great number of anonymous letters which give all sorts of views upon current questions. But as the years passed, there came to be one subject upon which unfavorable views were not printed. In the early period criticisms and expressions of disapproval of slavery were fairly common; but after the rise of the abolition agitation opinions of that sort were no longer published. This silence was eloquent—and sinister.

The purpose of this rambling article has been partly to give a glimpse of conditions as shown by the indisputable sources, but mainly to indicate that the materials exist for a complete political, social and economic history of any given community and of the South as a whole. The material can be discovered only by diligent search, and it can be wrought into history only by intelligent and persevering interpretative study. The difficulty of the work has heretofore prevented its accomplishment upon any large scale, but the rewards awaiting the patriotic historian who sets forth the clear and convincing truth about the South will be great enough to blot out the memory of his tedious labor.*

*There has just appeared from the press of McGowan & Cooke, of Chattanooga, a volume of *Memoirs of the Fort and Fannin Families*, edited by Kate Haynes Fort. This book contains an excellent biography of Dr. Tomlinson Fort, long a prominent citizen of Milledgeville, and gives a good account of family life in the community. As an accurate and attractive history of a typical well-to-do family, it is a valuable contribution to the social history of the South.

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